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Abstract

Much research has been done about the Eskimos, but with little beneficial result to the Eskimo. Economic development of northern Canadian territories has resulted in a wider gap between Eskimos and other Canadians since benefits accrue only to the second group. Evidence of damage to the land is already appearing. To solve problems of land use, conservation efforts could involve Eskimos and thus solve employment problems for the Eskimo. In conservation pursuits, the land would suffer less and Eskimos would have a wider range of opportunities than the mining industry or local government positions could provide. (JH)

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LAND PROBLEMS AND PEOPLE PROBLEMS -

THE ESKIMO AS CONSERVATIONIST *

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So much nonsense has been written about the Canadian Eskimo that it takes a great deal of temerity or ignorance to launch yet another idea aimed at aiding these traditional peoples of the tundra regions. In the past fifteen years of accelerated cultural contact, the Eskimo has been romanticized, patronized, commercialized, and finally bureaucratized. In Alaska, Eskimos are alleged to ask "Who is your anthropologist?"; in Canada, the question might be phrased as "Who are your civil servants?". It always comes as a shock to non-Canadians to learn that Canada's Eskimos number only about 15,000.

The Eskimo in Canada has given rise to a veritable research industry. Their language has been dissected, their graveyards excavated, their kinship systems unravelled, their adaptability studied,

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their problems probed. But the field seems to have been almost worked out now for a number of reasons. With a small population, only a certain number of studies can be made. The simple, descriptive studies have been done; skilled specialists are now needed for an understanding of complex problems. Research cannot continue indefinitely. A standing joke describes a nuclear Navaho family as comprising one father, one mother, three children - and two anthropologists. To which family grouping could be added, in the Canadian North, one social worker, one economic development specialist, and two "counsellors" - one from the Federal government and one from the Territorial government.

The other reason for the exhaustion of research possibilities among Canadian Eskimos is that there has been little pay-off for the people <u>on</u> whom the research has been done. Anthropologists and others have done a great deal to alert government officials to the real dimensions of the "Eskimo problem". Those social scientists who have been accepted by the Eskimos have assisted these people to understand the limits of the possible. The work done by the Northern Science Research Group of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in their Mackenzie Delta Research Project has been quite outstanding. But too much Eskimo research has resulted in an accumulation of research reports, theses and papers. The Eskimo has been a "good thing" for many academics, a captive audience that could be exploited for publication. The careful, realistic, ethically planned research projects stand out like solitary peaks in the flat plains of mediocre writing and research. At one end of the spectrum, "pure research", untainted by any considerations of applicability has brought promotion

and increased status to academics. The Stefansson syndrome ("He spent a year with the Eskimos, you know") is appearing on many campuses. At the other end of the spectrum there have been quick studies to find a solution to the "Eskimo problem" which has resulted in simple nose counting being rationalized as research.

What has never seemingly been questioned by the Eskimo research industry - or the government - has been the utility of the studies for helping the Eskimo identify meaningful opportunities for solving his own problems in his own way. Little of the Negro Research Industry helped Black Americans to determine possible ways of identifying and solving their problems in terms that had relevance to them. In the North, few people have cared or dared to question the basic assumptions underlying Canada's northern development policy.

Between those ethnologists and anthropologists and others who seek to "keep" the Eskimo in his unspoiled, primitive state, and government officials who want to drag him into the industrial world, the Eskimo as a person seems to have been lost. I remember asking an ethnologist how the new government housing programmes would affect the Eskimos he was studying. He blinked and said, "I don't know anything about that". And the recent frantic attempts to impress the industrial job ethic on the Eskimos have become apparent in the public utterances of government officials before such bodies as the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Here I would like to pay tribute to the officials of that Department. Every scientist knows the problems of carrying out research in a free spirit of enquiry on sensitive national problems. During my

time in the Department, I was allowed great latitude in following my interests wherever they led. Since that time, the Canadian Research Centre for Anthropology has received Departmental grants to aid its northern research programme. The support that this Conference has received from that Department also indicates that the government is aware and concerned about the human and ecological problems of the Canadian North. The role of the scientist in modern society, however, must be to question every aspect of reality. In social science, it is important that the enquirer also attempts to put forward alternative possibilities at every level from the theoretical to the practical, and also be aware that he is attempting to understand what is going on, and not to condemn any person or agency.

The Developmental Thrust

Looking back over the fifteen years since 1954, when the Canadian Government officially discovered the North, it is possible to get some understanding of what the problems of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories really are.

From the beginning, the regions north of 60°N were seen as mineral rich areas just waiting to be "opened up". The myth of the rich north, based on singular developments such as the Klondike Gold Rush and the wartime demand for uranium from Great Bear Lake, still persists. There was an initial enthusiasm about the richness of the north, and a continuing series of disillusionments as the best laid schemes of men crashed down on the harsh reality of the land. At the same time that high hopes were being raised about the fabulously wealthy north by certain politicians and others charged with "developing"

the area, others in government departments - cartographers, geologists, geophysicists, oceanographers - were accumulating a great deal of data and solid knowledge on the exact dimensions of the Territories. There was the familiar of slippage between cautious scientific estimates and enthusiastic boosterism. When the new American nation burst its boundaries and went west in the nineteenth century, the land seemed to offer an endless bounty. It took a hundred years for skilled and sensitive men to realize that the land was being looted and that a delicate ecology was being disturbed. By the time the conservation movement got into its stride, much damage had been done and it has taken most of this century to repair the ravages of the nineteenth century and to introduce modern concepts of land management. There is still a lot of mess and waste around, and needless harm is still being done to the land, but there is plenty of vociferous opposition to any planned despoliation of special areas like the Redwoods of California.

Canada's northern development policy to date has been equated with the exploitation of mineral resources. These are located in very specific areas. Any mining or oil development in the Arctic will involve a total approach to resource development. It will not be enough to open a mine, rip out the minerals and then leave the land and the people wounded.

For every northern "developer" of the exploitive type, there seems to be, in Canada, a northern "conserver". If the eyes of the developer see numerous mines springing up in the tundra and oil pouring forth at the tap of a rock, the conservationists worry about the birds and the vegetation. No Eskimo group has had so much attention

and money lavished on them as have the Whooping Cranes.

White "outsiders" have a curiously ambivalent attitude towards the North. What they seem to ignore is that they are strangers in a land in which the Eskimo has lived for a long time. They also seem intent on clashing with each other on every occasion, oblivious of the fact that both mineral exploitation and conservation can be parts of the same holistic approach to development, and that these aspects can be complementary and not competitive. It seems very obvious that the Canadian Mining Industry - as distinct from fly-by-night operators - is showing concern for the ecology of the areas in which the companies operate. International Nickel Company runs ads in the press and on the radio about reafforestation of mining areas. The Canadian North needs large capital inputs for any form of development. It is less the large mining companies that we should worry about than the small operators trying to clean up and clear out. A northern development approach that plays up the idea of the rich north and encourages any small operator or greedy individual to take what he wants (and provides subsidies and propaganda for these activities) is obviously going to result in serious insult to the environment. But the crude, opportunistic, exploitive approach to northern development seems to be petering out.

The North provides instant feedback, and the warning signs about the unanticipated consequences of an exploitive northern development policy are now flashing vividly. It seems obvious that the Canadian North - despite all the political exhortations - is not the American West. It cannot stand an incessant assault upon its ecology. Enough evidence will be presented at this conference to

show that ecological damage has been done by the unthinking and acquistive thrust for development. It is my intention to comment on the human damage being done, and to suggest possible ways of resolving some of the problems of the land and the people.

"The Eskimo Problem"

The resource development pattern in the Canadian North, with its boosterism, its boomer talk, its careless use of the land, has a quaint nineteenth century air about it. The cultural lag appears in the programmes of human development also. In public statements, the nineteenth century paternalistic attitude appears. A linear, reductionist approach has been suggested for solving the Eskimo problem. The general logic seems to go this way. The Canadian North is a mineral rich area. There is very little else on which to build an economic base for development. Therefore the government must aid those who wish to mine the North. The mines will need labour. The Eskimos live in the North. They will provide a source of labour for the mines. They must be educated and trained to work in northern mines. This will be done by southern Canadians who do not speak Eskimo and whose education seldom includes any grounding in anthropology. This logic falls apart on closer examination. There have been only one or two mines in the tundra. Rankin Inlet had a short life and closed when the rich ore pocket was exhausted. Where are the other mines? There are prospects for new mines in northern Quebec. Attempts are being made to develop copper bodies in the Coppermine area, with no notable success to date. There is a "mountain of pure iron ore" in northern Baffin Island, in an area

with a very short shipping season. Each time this mine receives mention, the tonnage goes up and the shipping season seems to increase. At the present time, there appears to be an oversupply of iron ore in the world. Even if every mineral prospect in the tundra became a mine, it is doubtful whether this would create employment for all Eskimos requiring jobs. These mines would require a high level of science and technology, membership in a union, and a high standard of education. The North is a capital-intensive area, and many of the ideas of using Eskimos as miners seem to be based on the belief that there will be plenty of pick and shovel and other unskilled work to be done around such operations. More than this, the Eskimos have not had 300 years experience of the machine and of machine modes of thought. The Eskimo is a logical person, but there is no indication that machine based logic is the only valid form of human mental activity. There is a persistent belief that the Eskimo is "naturally" mechanically inclined. It is hard to determine how this belief arose, but I remember once reading in Hints to Travellers, that handy Royal Geographical Society guide to the Englishman abroad, about an Arctic explorer who got his watch mended by an Eskimo. From such slender beginnings do stereotypes often grow.

While not denying that mining offers possible options for Eskimo employment, it does seem as if the government, in pushing for jobs for Eskimos, has run into a blind alley. In 1968-69, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development stated that its policy for northern employment was to ensure that, by 1978, 75% of all government jobs in the North would be held by Northerners.

Again, we have paper promises. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has no control over the personnel policies of other government departments. Nor may it have much say in the Territorial Government hiring policy. The logic of suggesting that a job in the government is the ultimate goal to which all northerners should aspire may escape some people who have had close contact with life in the northern bureaucracy. Even a brief glance at the qualifications needed for positions in the rapidly expanding Northwest Territories Government will raise doubts about the validity of the Department's suggestion. All seem to require university graduation, specialized skills and wide experience - qualifications that few northerners, and no northern native peoples possess.

While the White Man in the North sees himself as leading the Eskimos across the gulf between the cultures, both sides of the gulf seem to be drifting rapidly apart. The traditional Eskimo culture is being lost and the North is moving rapidly into post-industrial society where knowledge and information are the important resource bases, and flexibility, adaptability and sensitivity to feedback are needed for people to make sense of a dynamic world. In such a world people do not have "job" - an industrial term. They have a number of roles that can vary with the operational setting. People do not learn one skill that carries them through life, but learn how to learn, so that they can take advantage of available opportunities. So much western education - up to the Ph.D. level - is merely trade training, based on an accumulation of skills and a piece of paper that enables a person to command a price in the labour market. The very terms used indicate the problem - men are seen as

commodities to be bought and sold. They are seen as ends to the fulfilment of the needs of a machine oriented, consumer society. There is ample evidence to indicate that this pattern of industrial society is beginning to disintegrate, like ice in the spring sun.

The Eskimo problem highlights the dilemma of the transition from one form of society to another. Why should the Eskimo work in mining or for the Government? Is dependence on welfare a shameful thing for the Eskimo? There is evidence that the Eskimo sees the white newcomers who shower benefits on them merely as another resource in the ecology - a cow to be milked, a presence to be courted or avoided. Culture provides a pair of spectacles through which people see their distinct worlds. In the North, the white outsider's view has either been obtained through pink lenses or through those of darkest black. Increasingly, the white presence in the Arctic is being resented by the native peoples there. The white man is being seen as an irrational and erratic source of benefits - someone who promises things, and does not deliver, someone who lives in a separate world with many benefits denied the local people. When the expected benefits promised by the white man do not arrive, there is always an "explanation". Usually, it is "budgetary cuts" or "financial limitations". The northern peoples respond by sullen silence, by self help attempts (such as the co-operatives) or by other strategies. At Rae, in 1968, a prophet arose, and the cargo cult approach - obtaining the benefits of the white man's world, without having to put up with the presence of the white man - may appeal to northern native peoples.

The fact that the Eskimo seems to be perched on a plateau,

between two worlds, is being ignored. Life is much safer and surer than ever before for these people. But the future is murky. The Eskimo experience with the white man has not been reassuring in the main, and an avoidance pattern is developing that could bring bitterness to the North. "Two nations", a dual economy, a caste system, a wide gap between affluent whites and poor Eskimos demonstrate the dilemmas of western style development where benefits accrue to only one privileged group. While the white policy makers look for jobs for Eskimos in mining, government and the service industries, the Eskimos are glancing west and east. In Greenland they see a more enlightened policy of social development for a people identified as "Greenlanders" and not as "Eskimos" and "Whites". In Alaska they see strong native organizations using the political process to claim traditional land rights. The Alaska Federation of Natives and other nativistic groups have laid claim to large areas of Alaska on the Basis of aboriginal rights, and they have held up development of all kinds in many areas.

The acceptance of the validity of traditional cultures is a fairly recent phenomena. Science, among other things, is an attempt to understand an existing reality. Under the influence of such thinkers as Claude Lévi-Strauss, anthropologists are beginning to re-examine traditional cultures. "Re-search" implies looking at old realities anew. Traditional cultures were specific ways of adapting to an environment - "natural" and "human". They were neither barbarous perversions of man's nature nor idealized expressions of unspoiled and untroubled savage states. The Rousseau-ish strain of romanticism is still rampant in Canada.

When traditional peoples like the Alaskan natives learn from their knowledge of the old ways how to handle whites who see development only as an immediate exploitation of the most accessible and easily saleable parts of the natural environment, it is about time that those involved in northern Canada give pause. The United States experience can serve Canada as a Distant Early Warning Line - if we can sort the signals from the noise.

Northern development in Canada has reached what appears to be the "take off" point, as far as can be determined, with the new mines at Pine Point, Cassiar, New Imperial and elsewhere bringing forth wealth. The development thrust has squeezed in two directions. The land is being insulted and the people of the North, especially the traditional peoples whose home the Arctic is, are being damaged or shut out of possibilities for a meaningful life. They flit around the fringes of the white man's world, like shadows, "looked after" and kept alive by a welfare state bureaucracy.

It would be presumptuous for another white man to offer advice to the Eskimos. We have had numerous conferences in Canada where people whose interest in the North was pecuniary or short term have pontificated on what "The North" and the native peoples needed. A people who have survived in that land may have no need of such advice. A land that is so large and vast will not be changed by clichés and platitudes poured out in southern latitudes. The earth will abide, the people endure.

For the white man's world is changing, even as he offers his way to the Eskimo as the ultimate life style for all. The white man's concept of central place and total control is slowly

slipping, in the North as elsewhere. It is more visible in the North, and so perhaps preventative measures or a therapeutic approach can be more readily accepted there. Here paternalism - no matter how well intentioned - must be replaced by participatory democracy where people are involved and consulted about matters that concern them. This must be coupled with a scientific understanding of the operational limitations that will replace the wild guessing that has passed for forecasting in the past.

Tying the Ends Together

Elsewhere, I have stressed the necessity of thinking of the Eskimo-white relationship in terms of a symbiosis, and not as a parasitic arrangement that it only too frequently becomes. Our understanding of physics and biology permit modern men to conceptualize about new models for human action. The nineteenth century modes of thought, based on inadequate knowledge about the natural world, can be now discarded. In the Canadian North, the modern world has arrived in a series of explosions compressed into the past fifteen years. The North needs a high level of science and technology - and this implies that we must begin with the concepts of science that are becoming available from recent research in the physical and the biological sciences. As in everything else in the North, there has to be a great leap in the conceptual frameworks that guide our actions and influence our programmes there.

In Labrador-Ungava, south of the tree line, lichen forms much of the ground cover. Lichen is a symbiosis between an algae and a fungi. It takes hundreds of years to achieve a thickness of

a few inches, in a climate that lacks heat and light, on a soil that contains few nutrients. The lichen lives between the air and the rock, clinging tenaciously to an inhospitable earth surface. Yet this vegetation can be stripped off a surface swiftly by a bulldozer blade clearing a site for a mine.

Obviously northern mining companies have to watch out for the land. The North is vast, but small errors and carelessness can lead to widespread ecological damage that can harm large areas. Evidence of damage is already appearing. The tundra has the advantage that, in its immensity, it is yet a fairly simple habitat where the consequences of actions affecting the ecology can be seen and understood in a short space of time, and without too much difficulty. We do not have to wait long in that timeless land to see how Man affects the land. The Arctic provides almost instant feedback, but skill and sensitivity are needed to understand what is happening now and to prevent further damage.

I do not intend to discuss how ecological damage can be identified and repaired. I am more concerned in this paper, with who will do the repairing.

And here arises, the possibility of uniting, in a mutually meaningful manner, a damaged land and an insulted people. It is to be hoped that, in their search for possibilities for Eskimo employment, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development does not neglect the idea of creating careers in occupations that are healing and integrative, and not merely exploitive or of a service nature. Instead of painting the Eskimos into an industrial corner, the government can outline areas where careers could be developed

that are meaningful to young Eskimos. It is among the young Eskimos that the need is most acute for meaningful employment. This is not so much an Eskimo problem as a problem of all young people. It is more serious among the Eskimos because their external environment is less rich than that of most southern youths.

In the United States, the rapid increase in technology has led to what seems to be an ethical and political impasse. Literally millions of the poor are without jobs, employment, or the prospects of employment. This same situation is rapidly developing in Canada. Here the young Eskimo is a favoured person. He has a culture he can still reach, touch and understand; even though it has been devalued by change agents, it remains alive in the anthropological and historical records and in the memories of the old people. Accelerating urbanization and industrialization hit semi-skilled and unskilled workers hard - the machine has no culture, and can become obsolete in a matter of a few years.

How can young Eskimos bridge the gap and move out of their present state of limbo into a meaningful future for themselves and other members of their culture? The usual way of handling the older section of the Eskimo community is to mouth platitudes like: "We shall have lost an entire generation", "They can live on welfare", "There is nothing you can do with the ones who never went to school". In discussing the ways in which Eskimos might act as conservationists, it is necessary to stress that this suggestion is not put forward as a "final solution" to the Eskimo problem. Nor is the romantic viewpoint espoused that <u>all</u> Eskimos were natural conservationists in their approach to the land and its resources in the past. The way in which

some Eskimo groups slaughtered the caribou with rifles should indicate that there is nothing "natural" about their behaviour in this respect. The Eskimo perhaps viewed the land as the farmer does - as a source of sustenance. And there are good farmers who understand and work with the land, and bad farmers who abuse the soil and ruin it. Unlike urban dwellers in southern Canada, the Eskimos cannot escape the land and the natural environment. In traditional times, the Eskimo had to know the land - not from a sense of aesthetics, but for the sake of survival. And knowing the land meant learning its regularities and its vagaries in detail.

How can this assist the Eskimo in bridging the yawning gap between traditional society and the post-industrial world?

Any employment in the future must have a number of characteristics. It must carry status. It must be science based, and open ended in the sense that it must involve the learning process as an integral part of daily operations. It must be restorative and recreative in the sense of determining new ways of developing and expanding a person's potential. The opportunities should be integrative and self-actualizing, helping the person to understand the complex realities of his own being and of the external environment.

If there is a need to heal and care for the tundra, there is also a need to heal and care for the tundra people - not in a veterinary-hygienic way, but in a genuinely scientific and humanistic manner. Any conservation efforts could and should involve Eskimos - young people working with the conservationists, learning with them through doing those monotonous jobs that are part of the

process of scientific training. Older Eskimos could provide logistical support, and the old people, now sitting on the sidelines of life, could be involved by telling what the land was like. In this way, old and young could contribute to the healing process, one providing the muscle, and the other the mind.

Eskimos could be involved in interpreting the landscape for visitors. At one time the concept that one of the North's main functions would be to serve as an outdoor learning laboratory and classroom for a total sensory immersition would have given rise to a certain degree of hilarity. For a number of years, Europeans - and especially the English - have looked upon the Arctic as a place in which to disport themselves, living with the Eskimos and sledging all over the landscape. Now it is possible for schoolboys and affluent Americans to visit the Arctic. The former trip costs $1,700 out of Toronto, the latter $3,900. Of course, one can always get a free guided tour of the Arctic if you join the ranks of Arctic boosters, or have sufficient influence to join those private and government sponsored tours during which people are taken around to see the booming North, or travel with the intent of solving all northern problems in a series of one day visits and overnight stops.

A Possibility

Regretably, in Canada, there has been little debate on northern development. The Government seems to believe in the idea of Holy Grail, and, firm in their illusions, they have until recently displayed little willingness to discuss other options for development, or to exchange folklore for scientific knowledge. All this is

changing. What is happening in the North cannot be kept from the eyes of all Canadians.

This paper has attempted to outline a possible way of linking the land and the people of the tundra together. Careers in conservation would make Eskimos mobile - if they wished to stay in the North, they could do so. If they wished to travel, and to live "outside", they could do this too. Their skills and their knowledge would be portable, just as they were in the old days. For this was the way it was in the old days. A man could carry little on his back in the tundra, but much in his mind. A concerned scientific effort needs to be made in the North if the vicious circle of despoliation of the land and despair in the people is not to turn into a downward spiral as it has done in places like Appallachia. The most depressing thing about Canada's North at this time is the human waste, lives being lived out in tatters and without form, shape or promise.

It is usual to talk about financial limitations as the restraining factor on any new idea. Quite obviously, the government must be informed and involved in any new endeavours for employing Eskimos in conservation. But I do not believe that Government can handle this problem. As with western style development programmes elsewhere in the world, the first rush of adventurous speculation and action has been replaced by bureaucratic inertia and infighting between different departments and agencies. There is a need for a third party in the North, some group or agency that stands between Eskimos and the government and serves as a channel of communication,

a nursery of new ideas, an entre' aide, an enabling mechanism to unclog the channels and untie the red tape, while animating everyone in an understanding of the limits of the real world.

For anyone who has watched, bemused as millions have been poured into projects with little pay-off in the North, it is enchanting to see the defensive attitude taken by government over ideas outwith their stream of thought. Money could be found for a pilot project - perhaps from one of those numerous other government agencies that have sprung up to solve Canada's people problems. The human and ecological cost of not doing something to repair the damage in the north should be obvious to the most unskilled eye. In 1968, budgets in the Yukon Territory were cut for fire protection, although there seemed to be ample funds to "help" developers of the booster type. In June, 1969, half a million acres of Yukon forest were on fire. One fire burnt down the new mining town of Faro. It is not mere chance that the Yukon's newest mining venture is named for a game of chance.

If funds are to be invested in northern development in the future, they can best be spent, not on roads or on dubious economic ventures rationalized as attempts to "develop" the country that result in benefits to a favoured few, but on training young Eskimos in the skills of conservation. Each year, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development faithfully budgets $10,000,000 for roads in the Territories. The Department obviously sees this programme as one that "opens up" the North. A small part of one year's road budget, spent on training young people in the techniques

of conservation, would have higher pay off in every way. The land would suffer less, and young Eskimos would have access to a wider range of opportunities and possibilities than in the mining industry and the government. Their knowledge and their skills would be welcome anywhere in the world, for the North is not the only place suffering from ecological damage under the impact of exploitive development.

In conservation and like pursuits, working with scientists, young and old Eskimos could come together with other Canadians in the relationship of equals that science involves. A selective search of the past, and a scrutiny of the present could lead to a more meaningful movement into the future. All involved would learn from each other and enrich each other's understanding of the limits of the possible in that strange land at the world's end - the Canadian Arctic.